Zamindars of South India

March 19, 2012

The fascinating

Zamindars

Part-I

Salutations to everyone!! I'm going to delve into the topic of a fascinating piece of history today, on the notable Zamindar's of South India, many of whom had left uncanny marks on the socio-politics of South India, while having equally uncanny lives, however short lived and bygone they may have been.

The Etymology of the word "*Zamindar"* is attested to be of Persian origin, meaning *landowner*, and was in use since the time of Mughal rule in the subcontinent.

During the British Raj and rule of colonial India was the true "Golden age of Zamindar's"

spanning about 90 years from 1858-1947.

However, before that Zamindars were prominent in the East India Company era, spanning from 1757-1858 officially, although it had been active since the 1600's, but did not hold as much influence or wealth as they did in the Raj.

The British had three important systems in place for administration of Colonial India during the Raj, the Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalwari, in which the Zamindar's held absolute landownership and were given power to collect taxes and rent from the workers and labourers of the land, to pay a fixed amount to the Raj (or the East India company, earlier).

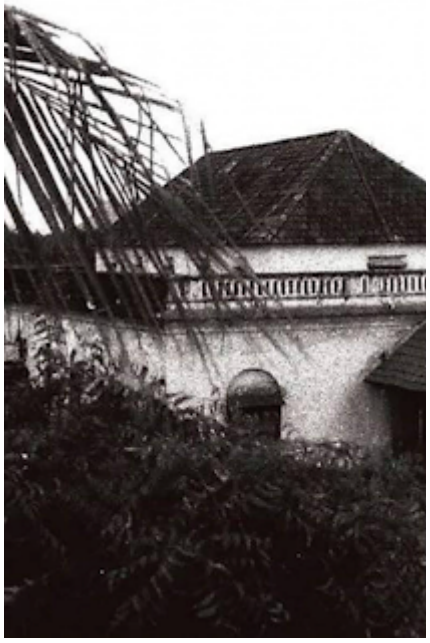
This system led to the British gaining large amounts of wealth and the Zamindars personally becoming quite wealthy too, becoming close to the ruling elite and expanding their wealth through connections, marriage and education, many of these aristocrats also became patrons of the arts and culture, often creating a new class of British-educated, local landed aristocracy.

In this blog series, we will be focusing in detail on the Zamindar's of South India and their personal lives and accomplishments, including their contributions to society and their sometimes scandalous happenings.

Prominent and major Zamindars of South India:

1) Singampatti Zamin

Zamindar of Singampatti, the Raja T.N.S.Theerthapathy (at age 19) and wife, Late T.Chandra Kumari Nachiyar (at age 16) photo taken in 1949-1950.



Photograph of the Singampatti Palace as seen in the early mid 1900s, (still stands today)

2) Nuzvid Zamindar :

The Nuzvid Zamnidari in present day north eastern Andhra, a little bit off Vijayawada, has a history dating back to the 16th century to the Nuvzid royal family. Historically, this was a massive estate spanning about 290 villages, and was partitioned by the British following the rebellion of Meka Narashima Apparao, and dived into six smaller Zamindaris each son's of the Nuvzid line, while some were not related but purchased Zamindaris . The most prominent of them were the Mizapuram, Kapileswarapuram and Vuyyuru Zamindari's, while the Mirzapuram and Vuyyuru families where related as offshots of the same Nuvzid Zamindari, the Kapileswarapuram family was not related to them, but rather was a Zamindari estate sold to them in order to fetch revenue and keep with competitive taxation .

Nuvzid Zamindari's Gate

While the Nuvzid Zamnidari became a much smaller piece of what it once was, it existed till the 1950 abolition of the Zamindari, altogether as a lesser scope of its former glory, but was still quite important as it gave birth to the Mirzapuram and Vuyyuru estates which had stories quite, larger than life.

- Kapileswarapuram

Zamindari

Late Zamindar of
Kapileswarapuram; Sri Raja
Venkata Ranga Appa Rao
Bahadur

The Palace of
Kapileswarapuram, built 1905.

- Mirzapuram Zamindar

A photograph of Her Highness, Actress, Rani Krishnaveni (front) a picture of the Late Raja of Mirzapuram can be seen (hung on the wall in the back).

3) Pithapuram Zamindari

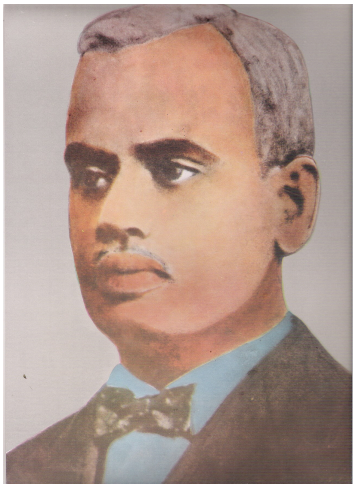
The Zamindari of Pithapuram was a prominent and wealthy Zamindari on the banks of the Eluru river in the north eastern part of present day Andhra Pradesh, and was among one of the richest and most famous of all South Indian Zamindaris.

The Zamindars of Pithapuram are said to belong to the Velama commiunty of Telugu descent, they gained prominence roughly during the mid to late 19th century and emerged as a strong Zamindari in the Madras Presidency.

One of the most prominent of the Raja's of Pithapuram was undoubtedly, Maharaja Venkata Kumara Surya Rao, while he held the title of Raja hereditarily, he was honoured by the personal distinction of the titular of "Maharaja" by the British and was further regarded as "Commander of the British Empire" (CBE), this can be attributed

to his charitable work of funding schools and institutions, as well as founding the first ever Telugu dictionary *"Suryaraya Andhra Nighantuvu"*.

He married Rani Chinnamamba devi, (later known as Maharani Chinnamamba devi) from the Mirzapuram Appa Rao family, they had four daughters and two sons all of whom reached fame and prominence in society circles; HH Maharani Sita devi of Baroda (formerly Rajkumari or Princess of Pithapuram) Ishorani Kamala Devi of Cooch Behar, Rani Manjula devi of Sidli , Rani Bhvyamma devi of kotapadu, Yuvraja Rama Rau and Rajkumar Venkata Mahapati surya rau.



His Highness, Meherban-i-Dostan Sri Maharaja Ravu Venkata Kumara Mahipathi Surya Rao Bahadur Garu (commonly refered to as known as "Pithapuram Raja")

HH Maharani Sita Devi of Baroda (right with black fur coat) as seen with HSH Princess Grace of Monaco (left in white fur coat) photo possibly mid to late 1960s

The Pithapuram family were known for owning a very grand palace in Alwarpet, Madras in the early to mid 1900s, in the present day Venus colony area, in fact the two roads adjoining are named after Mahraja Surya Rao and Maharani Chennammamba devi, however they later moved

to another residence in Cenotaph road area, after the tragic death of Rani Chennammamba whose Sari caught on fire.

Sita devi of Pithapuram was dubbed "the Indian Wallis Simpson" as she had a very glamorous and scandalous life in luxury and opulence and was connected to international jet-set circles.

The Pithapuram palace in Alwarpet in Venus colony area is said to have been demolished in the the mid to late 1990s and in place an apartment complex has come.

4) Uthukuli Zamindar

The Uthukuli Zamin family is said to descend from an old and landed aristocracy particularly the descendants of Kalingarayar's a clan of landed people during the imperial chola era.

they ruled over parts of today's western Tamilnadu.

the Uthukuli family also are from the community of Gounder, the family has deep roots since 1250CE.

The feudal landholdings transitioned into a Zamindari in the early 19th century under the British, and by the mid 19th century had about 10,000 to 15,000 acres of land.

The Baronial residence is a bit off from Pollachi, in Uthukuli, and is said to be lived in for at least 790 years by the same family.

The family was known for its wealth and political prowess, often seen and photographed with the high and mighty of society from Nehru to British Governor-generals and Travancore princes, the family modernised fast but still preserves its ancient roots.

Photograph of the palace main entrance from a distance.

Photograph of MRN kalingarayar

5) Ettayapuram Zamindar

The Ettiyapuram Zamindari was one of the original Palyams during the Polygar wars post the

Nayaka decline, it became very powerful and was a major player in the 2nd polygar war.

The Ettayappan family descends from a Telugu aristocratic noble Nayaka family claiming to be from Chandragiri.

It has been documented as a ruled land since about the mid 16th century its first Raja being Jagavira Rama Kumara Ettappa Nayakar Aiyan in the mid 1500s.

post then, Ettiyapuram succeed to become a estate post the polyagar wars in about the mid to early 1800s, in 1901 it was at its peak having over 400,000 acres under its control and with a bustling population of over 100,000 people.

In the first Polygar war the Ettayapuram and Pudukottai princes debilitated with the British and aided the British in the capture of Veerapandiyan Kattabomman's hidden location in the forests surrounding Pudukottai, after Kattbomman had fled Panachalankuruchi fort when the British lay

siege to it, Kattambomman was subsequently hanged in Kayatharu, as his location having been discovered.

Photograph of gathering of Governor-general of Madras and Kalingarayar in Palayankottai.

Photograph (likely early 1900s) of the Ettayapuram palace in all its opulence.

The original palace and grounds still stand and belong to the Ettayapuram family, who are locally revered and respected. The Family still has much of its wealth and infleunce and continues to maintain its historic air of exclusivity and tradition, while no one actively uses the palaces and grounds, which are very much unkempt, there

seems to be some locally hired helpers who go in and tidy the area once in a while.

A photograph of the Zamindar of Ettayapuram, Raja Jagavira Rama Venkateshwara Ettappa Nayaka Bahadur (right side by the chair) and Jaganada Chettiar (as seen on left)

The family were once very important in several circles during the colonial era, especially among the British, and the Madras elite, with several people visiting them often to pay their respects and reminisce a long forgotten time, the family also hosted Nehru and had given him their car in which he had toured Madras, and also often hosted the British Governor-general of Madras during the Raj.

5) Nungambakkam Zamindars

While Nungambakkam brings to mind the Upscale Madras neighbourhood, this is in fact another Zamindari by the name of Nungambakkam which was an estate in the present day Thiruvallur district (a bit near Madras in fact).

The Zamindars of Nungambakkam belong to the princely Pari family, and have a very long history perhaps hinting at a Sangam past, the family claim descent from Vel Pari's daughter Sangavai and belong to the Velir, a minor dynastic royal house, they are related to the Ay-vels and the Venad dynasty.

While a temple off Kanchipuram carries some inscriptions about the said family and their ancient claims, and shows their presence at least possibly as early as the 1st century CE.

The Pari family were originally based on a kingdom near Tirukovilure.

During the second Carnatic war allied with the French under Dupleix against Muhhamad Ali Walajah and supported Chanda Sahib and Muzzafar jung in capturing Arcot, however in 1751 Robert Clive led British troops and defeated the French and their claimants, the Pari's who were in a hill-fort named *"Durgam"* near Gingee, fled to Pondicherry, as they were caught in the cross-fire between French and British troops.

In the Third Carnatic war, the Pari family sided with Comte de lally in the battle of Vandavasi in 1760 and were defeated again, they returned to Pondicherry, and in the 1760s were granted a princely title by King Louis the XV under Jean Law de Lauriston for their services to the French and to form deeper alliances.

post the second Polygar war, and third British capture of Pondicherry, the family were granted a Zamindari in present day Thiruvallur district for surrendering to the British.

In the early to mid 19th century, Prince de Durgam, the Raja of Nungambakkam, Mummudi Mannar Kon Tiruvengadoume Pillai, seeing the similarity between the (posher) Nungambakkam in the city and the village, named the Zamindari as a namesake.

The family was also known to own property in Madras, and be well-know in Madras circles, The Palace in Nungambakkam Village caught on fire in the 90's and little of it remains.

The Nungambakkam Palace late 1800s-early 1900s, (it was known to be modelled on Mowbary's Madras club)

A photograph taken late 1940s or early 1950s of HH Princess de Durgam, Rani Ellamma Pillai Pari (centre seated middle), Rajkumar prince Ethirajan Pillai Pari (right standing) and Rajkumari princess Jaya Pillai Pari (left standing).

I met Princess Rajkumari Padma Pari in her residence in Thiruvallur, she was soft-spoken and knowledgable, quite excited to tell of stories of her youth of how her father would come in a long horse-cart from Madras, and the two Polygar

Ghost Hounds her Mother Rani Ellamma used to have, and upon the dogs death how heartbroken the Rani was, and how they used to have Irish tutors teach them knitting, arithmetic and etiquette.

The princess is the final surviving daughter of the Last Raja of Nungambakkam.

Though the family has become a more lesser-known Princely family and Zamindari, they are a very old family, and are one of the only ones to have French and Raj era titles, which is quite rare.

6) Palaivanam Zamins

The Zamins of Palaivanam are not well documented but have been known to be a wealthy, landed aristocrtic family who have a long

history, Palaivanam a village in Pudukottai district houses the remnants of this once glorious Zamindari.

The Palaivanam Zamin family belong to the Kallar community and are known by title as Vangamudi Bandarathar.

The family descends from the Arnanthangi Thondaiman noble family, and are known as early as the 1600s, under Vanangamudi Bandarathar Vijaya Arunachala.

The family was very wealthy owning many cars and sending children to Lawrence in Lovdale, Ooty to study.

The Palaivanam Palace, is incredibly beautiful and intricate, although in derelict and ruined condition as has been predominantly abandoned.

Photograph of the Palaivanam Palace as seen from the overgrown entrance.

The Palaivanam Zamindar's later ventured into politics , the Raja A.Durayaiarasan, who was an MLA of Aranthangi constituency in the DMK party in the early 1960s, shows how the the Zamindars continue to be politically active and strong in regional and of state importance.

The last Zamindar of Palaivanam, Raja A. Durayaiarsan

Thank you for following along!

This blog seeks to discover the different stories of the fascinating lives of the Zamindar's of South India, will post soon! hope to hear from all of you!

Yours truly, Lydia Graham,

see you soon with more to write and a steaming coffee cup!

Comments

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Lydia's History and Memorabilia Blog

Hello everyone! I'm Lydia Graham Astor born in Madras and grew up here, I live in London currently, although I travel a lot. I've always been so intrested in the rich culture I got to witness and grow up around with, espeically in a city like Madras which you can never forget, I'd always settle for a filter coffee and a good book any day! I grew up to British parents and work in

London, I hope the blog serves to be a place were we can sit and think of all our memories and share and uncover our histories!

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